

Appl. No.: 09/991,883
Amdt. dated 02/09/2005
Reply to Office Action of November 12, 2004

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Applicants appreciate the thorough review of the present application as evidenced by the Official Action. The Official Action rejects Claims 21-26 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by a Business Travel News article entitled "Megs at a Crossroads" ("Article").

As explained below, independent Claims 21, 22, and 24 have been amended to more patentably distinguish the cited art. Applicants respectfully submit that independent Claims 23, 25, and 26 are currently distinguishable from the cited references. In addition, dependent Claims 27-38 have been added to further define respective independent claims of the present application. In light of the claim amendments and subsequent remarks, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and allowance of the claims.

The Article states, in the context of prospective business plans for American Express, that "the agency has developed a PC-based product that optimizes site selection by looking at attendees' points of origin, the land arrangements and the meal costs, and then producing a list of options for meeting sites ranked by cost" (Article, page 2). Although the Article does not disclose receiving date ranges, the Examiner finds that it is inherent that dates would be included to determine the availability of a meeting site.

Independent Claims 21, 22, and 24 have been amended to recite that an all-inclusive cost is calculated for hosting the meeting at each of a plurality of potential meeting facilities based on specified range of dates and information associated with the specified list of potential attendees. The all-inclusive cost includes, at least, travel and lodging costs (See Specification, page 3, lines 7-9). Independent Claim 21, 22, and 24 have been further amended to recite that the plurality of potential meeting facilities are ranked based at least in part on the calculated all-inclusive cost for each of the plurality of potential meeting facilities. By calculating the all-inclusive cost, the planner is better able to understand the relationship between price, location, and amenities. The planner may choose which amenities he or she wants in a facility, thus making tradeoffs that provide the best meeting value. Currently, it is difficult for planners to understand the real worth of complimentary meals, or of less expensive airfare into a given city, as most planners do not consider the all-inclusive costs which they can use to evaluate the value of these benefits.

Appl. No.: 09/991,883
Amdt. dated 02/09/2005
Reply to Office Action of November 12, 2004

Conversely, the Article does not teach or suggest calculating an all-inclusive cost for hosting the meeting at each of a plurality of potential meeting facilities based on specified range of dates and information associated with the specified list of potential attendees, and ranking the plurality of potential meeting facilities based at least in part on the calculated all-inclusive cost for each of the plurality of potential meeting facilities. The Article discloses using meal costs, as well as attendees' points of origin and land arrangements to rank meeting sites. Thus, the Article nowhere teaches or suggests using an all-inclusive cost that includes, at a minimum, lodging and transportation costs to rank each meeting site. At most, the Article teaches using meal costs, which is unlike the claimed invention that calculates an all-inclusive cost corresponding to an estimated total cost of holding the meeting at the meeting facility. Although the Article discloses using attendees' points of origin, the Article does not specify that travel costs associated with the attendees' points of origin, are taken into consideration, as opposed to merely determining the relative convenience or inconvenience of travel from the various points of origin. Furthermore, the Article discloses that land arrangements are considered when ranking the meeting sites, but again, the Article does not teach or suggest if and how the land arrangements are taken into consideration with respect to cost.

The Article also does not teach or suggest that the plurality of meeting facilities are selected from a set of potential meeting facilities based on at least one of preference and a geographic location, as recited by independent Claims 21, 22, and 24. In particular, the present application discloses that after receiving a list of potential meeting facilities with associated all-inclusive meeting costs, a planner is able to make tradeoffs between amenity preferences and geographic locations to determine the best value for a meeting facility (See Specification, page 14, lines 3-19; Figure 7). Thus, the planner is able to observe the effects on cost of the meeting facilities by choosing non-required amenities and acceptable locations. Depending on the importance to the planner, the planner is able to choose a specific preference or geographic location to modify the costs of the meeting facilities.

In contrast, the Article does not teach or suggest that the meeting facilities are selected from a set of potential meeting facilities based on a preference and/or geographic location. At most, the Article discloses producing a list of options for meeting sites ranked by cost. The

Appl. No.: 09/991,883
 Amdt. dated 02/09/2005
 Reply to Office Action of November 12, 2004

Article simply discloses that an original list of meeting sites is generated based on attendees' points of origin, the land arrangements, and the meal costs, but this list is not selected from a list of potential meeting sites based on a preference and/or geographic location. Thus, there is no teaching or suggestion in the Article to indicate that the list was selected from a set of meeting sites based on a preference and/or geographic location of the meeting sites, or that the list was otherwise modified by selecting a preference and/or geographic location.

Therefore the Article does not teach or suggest calculating an all-inclusive cost for hosting the meeting at each of a plurality of potential meeting facilities based on a specified range of dates and information associated with the specified list of potential attendees, and ranking the plurality of potential meeting facilities based at least in part on the calculated all-inclusive cost for each of the plurality of potential meeting facilities. In addition, the Article does not teach or suggest that the plurality of meeting facilities are selected from a set of potential meeting facilities based on at least one of preference and a geographic location. As such, the rejection of amended independent Claims 21, 22, and 24 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) is overcome.

Dependent Claims 27-29 and 33-38 have been added to further define independent Claims 21, 22, and 24. In this regard, dependent Claims 27-29 recite that the all-inclusive costs further include at least one of total meal cost and meeting space cost. As discussed previously, none of the cited references teach or suggest calculating an all-inclusive cost. Dependent Claims 33-38 recite that calculating the all-inclusive cost includes calculating optimized costs and summing the calculated optimized costs, which could include calculating the lowest costs for transportation, alternative dates, and/or travel. None of the cited references teach or suggest optimizing costs, which could include, for example, determining if attendees should fly or drive to the meeting. The present invention may then determine the costs associated with flying and driving and include the lower travel cost when calculating the all-inclusive costs for the meeting facilities. As a result, Applicants submit that dependent Claims 27-29 and 33-38 are distinguishable over the cited references for at least those reasons discussed above with respect to independent Claims 21, 22, and 24 and are, thus, allowable.

Appl. No.: 09/991,883
Amdt. dated 02/09/2005
Reply to Office Action of November 12, 2004

Moreover, Applicants submit that independent Claims 23, 25, and 26 of the present application are patentably distinct from the Article. Claims 23, 25, and 26 are directed to a method, computer-readable medium, and system, respectfully, for evaluating a plurality of potential meeting facilities. In particular, each of independent Claims 23, 25, and 26 include, among other steps, receiving or defining minimum requirements for a select meeting facility, and receiving a ranked list of meeting facilities, where each facility is ranked based on an all-inclusive cost-calculation corresponding to an estimated total cost of holding the meeting at the meeting facility. The minimum requirements correspond to amenities, such as hotel quality level, meeting room and guestroom capacities, and other items that are crucial to the success of the meeting (See Specification, page, 13, lines 14-17). For instance, the present application discloses that the planner could include a requirement that the meeting facility be located proximate to a manufacturing plant if the purpose of the meeting was to inspect the company's plant. As discussed previously, the all-inclusive meeting cost may include costs associated with travel, lodging, meals, meeting space, and incidentals.

As described above, the Article does not teach or suggest ranking meeting facilities based on an all-inclusive cost calculation corresponding to an estimated total cost of holding the meeting at the meeting facility. As also described above, the Article does not disclose that the meeting facilities included in the ranked list are selected from a set of potential meeting facilities based on at least one of preference and a geographic location. Furthermore, the Article does not teach or suggest defining or receiving minimum requirements for a select meeting facility. In fact, the Article does not teach or suggest using minimum requirements or amenities at all in ranking meeting sites. At most, the Article discloses ranking meeting sites by cost based on attendees' points of interest, the land arrangements, and meal costs. None of these factors relate to minimum requirements specified by a planner that must be satisfied.

As a result, the Article does not teach or suggest: receiving or defining minimum requirements for a select meeting facility; receiving a ranked list of meeting facilities, where each facility is ranked based on an all-inclusive cost-calculation corresponding to an estimated total cost of holding the meeting at the meeting facility; and selecting the meeting facilities included in the ranked list from a set of potential meeting facilities based on at least one of

Appl. No.: 09/991,883
Amdt. dated 02/09/2005
Reply to Office Action of November 12, 2004

preference and a geographic location, as recited by independent Claims 23, 25, and 26.
Therefore, the rejection of Claims 23, 25, and 26 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) is overcome.
Moreover, dependent Claims 30-32 have been added to further define independent Claims 23, 25, and 26, respectfully, and recite that the minimum requirements include amenities of the meeting facilities. Thus, it is submitted that dependent Claims 30-32 are allowable for at least those reasons discussed above with respect to independent Claims 23, 25, and 26.

Appl. No.: 09/991,883
Amdt. dated 02/09/2005
Reply to Office Action of November 12, 2004

CONCLUSION

In view of the amendments and remarks presented above, Applicants submit that all the claims of the present application are in condition for allowance. As such, the issuance of a Notice of Allowance is therefore respectfully requested. In order to expedite the examination of the present application, the Examiner is encouraged to contact Applicants' undersigned attorney in order to resolve any remaining issues.

It is not believed that extensions of time or fees for net addition of claims are required, beyond those that may otherwise be provided for in documents accompanying this paper. However, in the event that additional extensions of time are necessary to allow consideration of this paper, such extensions are hereby petitioned under 37 CFR § 1.136(a), and any fee required therefore (including fees for net addition of claims) is hereby authorized to be charged to Deposit Account No. 16-0605.

Respectfully submitted,

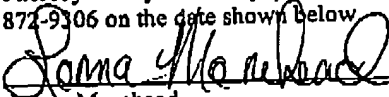


Trent A. Kirk
Registration No. 54,223

Customer No. 00826
ALSTON & BIRD LLP
Bank of America Plaza
101 South Tryon Street, Suite 4000
Charlotte, NC 28280-4000
Tel Charlotte Office (704) 444-1000
Fax Charlotte Office (704) 444-1111

CERTIFICATION OF FACSIMILE TRANSMISSION

I hereby certify that this paper is being facsimile transmitted to the US Patent and Trademark Office at Fax No. (703) 872-9306 on the date shown below


Lorna Morehead

February 9, 2005
Date

CLT01/4694862v1